Where Words Without Sound Are Plain as Lips

The Class in Lip Reading in Public School 93

"THE teacher asked the little chap who discovered America."

A simple sentence and yet it is "something else again" when delivered without sound. If under the circumstances you could correctly decipher the statement you would qualify for the upper class in lip reading for the mute at Public School 93, Amsterdam Avenue and Ninety-third Street.

Here are other sentences which Louise Morganstern, the preceptress, gives her pupils and which you may try upon your friends:

"The boy is playing with his pal.

"'A man's a man for a' that.'

"Are you a baseball fan?

"The soldiers were fighting a sham battle.

"Are you afraid of bats?"

In each of these sentences there is a felicitous arrangement of labials, mutes, gutturals, palatals, sibilants, etc. There is a modern consonant system which separates the consonants into their places of formation; hence the back, or guttural, and the front, or palatal. But the lip reader presumably is one whose hearing has been impaired and, consequently, a labiodental, a fricative or a nasal may get by his guard unless he defends himself with extreme perception.

Like Billiards

For lip reading is essentially perception and is based upon a study of the various formations of the lips in speaking.

Lip reading is not a new thing. Books have been written upon it, Miss Morganstern's among others, and this is the second year that classes have been conducted at Public School 93, which was first to give the new science a place among its night school classes. In the advanced class in lip reading there are thirty pupils, one-quarter being men.

"Men are difficult to interest in this science," said Miss Morganstern. "When a man's hearing becomes affected he seems unwilling to try to better his condition, although statistics prove that continued deafness makes for abnormality. Women are taught more easily, attend classes with greater regularity and outnumber the men three to one."

The advanced class in lip reading at Public School 93 gathers on the third floor in a small study room. The method of instruction is unique and interesting, particularly to one who has been previously unacquainted with a comparatively new subject.

The preceptress, who is herself deaf, asks questions or composes sentences which individual pupils are required to answer or repeat after her.

While the majority of the pupils are able to articulate, no word is intentionally spoken. Yet often the silence is broken by the unconscious utterance of some pupil, which, spoken in the sing-songy vein of one whose hearing is impaired, produces an effect that is moderately startling.

Broken Silence

Otherwise, all is conducted in silence or whispers. The preceptress, with expressive facial movement, asks questions in silence and thus they are answered.

It was also to be observed that even among grownups boys will be boys, for one baldheaded pupil extracted an unholy joy from punching a male neighbor on the shoulder most remote from him and looking as innocent as an ingénue. There were, indeed, enough of these prankish passages to warrant the belief that a schoolroom exerts a psychological effect upon the student which is seldom outgrown.

"I regret very much that soldiers whose hearing has been impaired in service do not take advantage of this course," said Miss Morganstern when class had been dismissed. "I am sure it would do them good and would mentally get them away from their misfortune. Lip reading is not difficult of attainment, though the ability of the pupil will depend upon practice and concentration. But even a rudimentary schooling in it will take away the feeling of helplessness and give the student an ability to follow conversation. It has also the value of a good mental stimulant."

The comparative difficulty of profile and full face lip reading is a matter that need not here be considered, nor the ability of the facile lip reader to detect the little verbal irrelevancies which are popularly attributed to screen actors and actresses.

With an Island and Forty Wives Waiting

THERE is no accounting for tastes, even among military men.

A little Iberian village where he might be foremost appealed more than second place in Rome to Julius Cæsar, regarded as quite a fighter in his day.

But Sergeant Robert A. McLean, of the Marine Corps, would rather write a good shampo advertisement than be sultan of a South Sea isle. He would rather be near Broadway than claim the forty wives that are awaiting him in Llang-Llang, off the coast of Borneo.

Before he sells his harem Bob is going to give his inherited wives the once over. Last week he left New York for San Francisco. The first boat will carry him off to the Southern Philippines to his throne, his household and his realm—all gifts of the old Sultan of Llang-Llang, who died four months ago.

To-day he has his discharge as a marine, after eight years in the service—eight years which have brought this youth of twenty-nine more romance than most men find in their lifetime. He was just out of high school when he enlisted out in San Francisco. He was looking for adventure, and he got it.

Off to the Philippines he went, with no mother protesting, because she had died years ago, and with the consent of his father, a professor in the University of California.

Down in the southern part of the Philippines, where the natives are light in skin and Mahometan in religion, duty took Sergeant McLean. He was one of twenty marines stationed on the island Polloc. They used to go hunting deer and wild hogs and other game. On one of these hunting expeditions Bob McLean and two friends met the Sultan of Polloc and his guest, the Sultan of Llang-Llang.

"The Sultan of Llang-Llang spoke fluent English," said Bob the other day in recalling the meeting. "He had spent several years in Syria where he learned English from American missionaries. He was better educated than his host and wore the green turban signifying that he had made a pilgrimage to Mecca.

Off For the Visit

"He invited me and my two friends to visit him. Several days later we hired a native canoe or banco and went from Polloc to the smaller island of Llang-Llang. This led to a pleasant friendship which lasted for more than a year.

"The Sultan lived on this island, three miles in circumference, which he owned. His house was two stories high and made of nipa fibre. It was set on stilts eight feet high and had twenty rooms. The cows and pigs and chickens were all kept in the space underneath the stilts. There were no windows of glass, but, instead, they were made of the same nipa fibre, which slid up and down and were always kept closed in rainy seasons.

"But the harem is off at a distance and during my stay there I never set eyes upon any of the wives. I do not know personally what they look like, though they are probably young and pretty, because the custom is to sell them to less prosperous rulers when the women grow fat and past thirty."

Sergeant McLean has taken his religion as he found it. Although his mother and his father, who died last December, were of Protestant faith, the son has fitted his religion to the clime. Down in the southern Philippines everybody is Mahometan and so the "devil dog" adopted that faith. The faithful of Mahomet baptized him with sand as they chanted the Arabic ritual.

That, perhaps, more than anything else, won him the esteem of the old Sultan and led to his adoption.

"He was eighty years old then," recalled the son and heir, "and so he must have been about eighty-six when he died. I guess he was sort of in his dotage, for he grew so fond of me that he said he wanted to make me his legal son, for he had no legitimate male heir. You see, the heir to be legitimate must be the offspring of the sultana, or first wife.

"I thought he was joking about making me his heir, but one day I received a summons to come to him at once and bring along two of my friends. I took Frank Kornegum, who was killed in France, and Sergeant Walter, of the Marine Corps, now stationed at Mare Island, Cal.

"When we reached the Sultan's home we were ushered into the public hall, which was really only a good-sized tent pitched high on stilts. There I found the Sultan looking very stately and important. My friends and I were taken into an adjoining room and dressed in long flowing robes, and then we were brought before the Sultan, who first bared his own chest and made a little slash in it with a Moro kris. Then he made me open my robe and bare my chest, while he cut the same size slash. Taking a drop of blood from his chest he mixed it with a drop of my blood, and from then on I was his adopted son. I left the next week and have never seen him since."

When Word Came

In fact, Bob says he had almost forgotten about the incident. He has been kept pretty busy at the Marine Recruiting Office on East Twenty-third Street. It's a long, long way to Llang-Llang, and his heart's been right here until word came a few days ago from the Moro Commission of his bequest. Señor Fernando Gorgas brought him word that his kingdom awaits. At that moment McLean had finished up his marine work for the day and was doing a little outside work for an advertising agency.

Specifically, he was writing copy for an advertisement of a brand of shampoo. You may have seen some of his earlier shampoo copy in the subway stations. Ad writing is much more to his liking than sultaning, and he told the señor so.

"But the forty wives?"

"I'll sell 'em."

"And the island of Llang-Llang?"

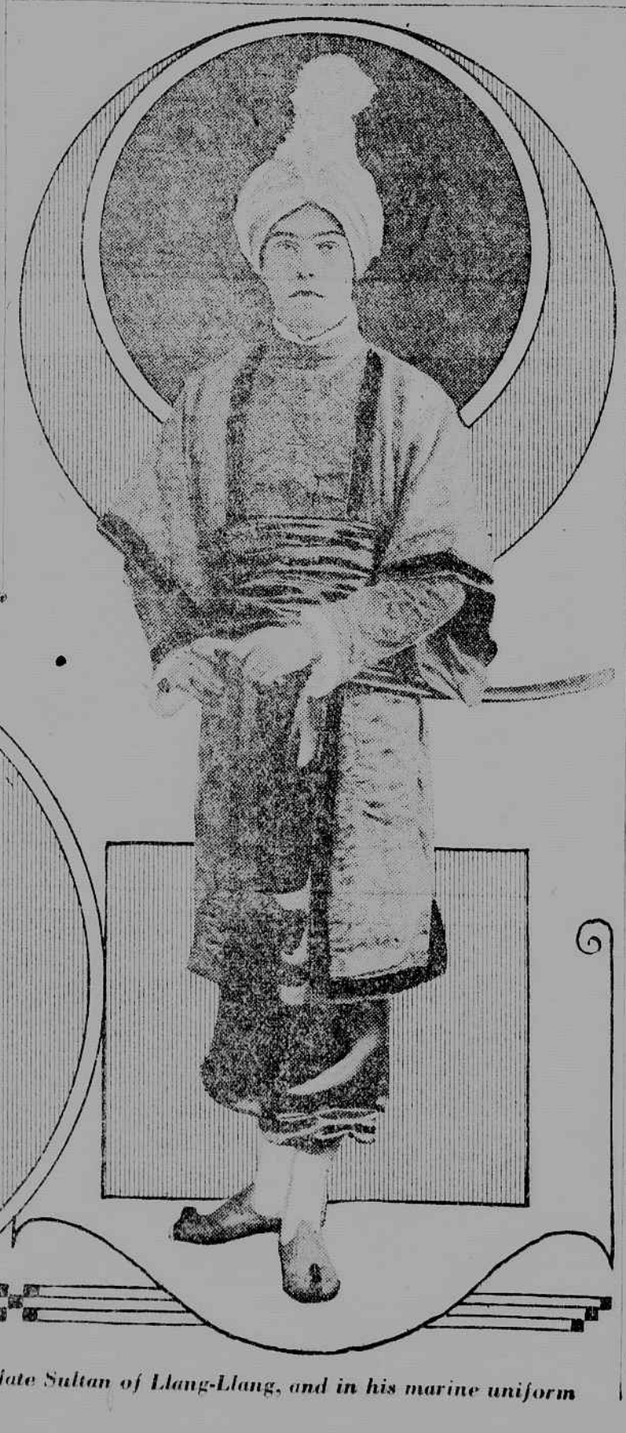
"I'll get a sub-sultan."

"And the pearls? You know you are entitled to 10 per cent of all the pearls taken by your subjects."

Here business took hold of the advertising man, where romance had failed. One pearl out of ten is not to be sneezed at on an island whose principal industry is pearling. There are 2,500 natives on Llang-Llang, and their chief occupation is going out in canoes and digging up pearls in the shallow waters. And custom has decreed that the Sultan gets a 10 per cent rake-off.

That settled it. These business affairs must be looked after. Sergeant McLean applied for his release from the Marine Corps, and last week he got it. Last week he left for the Philippines.

"I'll be back in New York as soon as possible," he said. "I can write better advertising copy here than in Llang-Llang."



Robert A. McLean, in the costume given him by the late Sultan of Llang-Llang, and in his marine uniform

D'Annunzio's Son-in-Law Visits Us

THE reporter who was sent up to the Biltmore to interview Signor Montanarella says that "from 3:45 until 7:20 fate hung in the balance." She lingered over a chocolate-malted milk and amused herself with speculations as to what sort of person the son-in-law of d'Annunzio would turn out to be. "A rather short young man," it developed; "about twenty-six or twenty-seven, with dark hair and very expressive dark eyes; a pleasant voice, which did its best with the difficult English; a manner suave and highly courteous—very alert. Also, a man distinctly not a feminist."

The reporter was sent up to call on Signor Montanarella, both because he is a son-in-law of d'Annunzio, and because, according to a news report, he is in America on a secret mission. The reporter came away with unshaken faith in his relationship to the famous captain of Fiume, but also with a firm denial of any secret mission at all. "I am here just to study, to see this great country." He made it quite emphatic. The secret mission part had to be dropped out of any scheme which may have involved soul-stirring headlines.

But the fact of the relationship remains to us. According to the reporter Signor Montanarella is "the first spokesman of the extreme nationalist shade of Italian opinion to arrive in this country."

The newspaper with which Signor Montanarella is connected, the "Giornale d'Italia," of Rome, is considered, with the "Idea Nazionale," as the leading organ of the nationalist group.

And now this ardent Italian journalist is in America. According to the reporter, "his smile was most disarming" (one would think the reporter must have gone in some way "prepared," as it were) "and his broken English delightful." As is always urgent in the case of interviews staged in the corridors of great hotels at noisy hours, the two first "found a nook out of earshot of the chattering tea drinkers." Then the solid part of the interview was negotiated—with the frequent aid, it seems, of Signor Mantanarella's little black pocket dictionary. ("It looked almost exactly like a prayer-book.") The reporter quotes him as saying:

"D'Annunzio is the only man in the world not touched by self-interest. I speak not as his son-in-law, but as his compatriot. For years he has been a celebrity, has been accorded honor and recognition by the serious intellects of the world. It was not for personal distinction that he arose in the cause of Italy, but to vindicate her sacred heritage, to safeguard her destiny.

"The Nitti government is one thing—a group of paid officials. But the voice of the people, the true government, acclaims d'Annunzio at Fiume. Fiume is Italian, by language, by tradition, by sympathy. She has always been recognized as a separate entity by the Austrian government. To Italy the question is settled. The heart of the Italian people will not yield the 'Pearl of the Adriatic' to artificial claims. D'Annunzio is the outburst of the Italian spirit claiming its own.

"The Italian people offer the American people true friendship and appreciation, none more so than d'Annunzio; witness his messages to the recent convention of aviators at Philadelphia.

"But—America must not try to dictate to Italy. America saved Europe from the Germans, but she must remember that the Allies also saved her.

"The Jugo-Slav is a barbarian by comparison, an infant in the family of civilization. Has not Italy herself helped to give him birth? President Wilson cannot know the Jugo-Slav as the Italians know him. He has seen only one or two comparatively superior representatives. He does not grasp the profundity of the ignorance of the people themselves, nor into what unskilled hands he would give the vital port of Fiume.

"No one can tell the solution of the problem, but if Fiume were granted her, probably Italy would ratify the league."

None of which will strike the reader as particularly new, only, by virtue of what the reporter calls "his astonishing vigor and alertness," it takes on a kind of new significance. Also, it must be remembered that all this was pronounced by the son-in-law of d'Annunzio. Throughout, "although reiterating much that has already been said on the Fiume question, he did so with a vehemence which made one realize afresh how close the matter lies to every Italian heart." As for the little pocket dictionary, "he always produced it with naive apologies"—especially in the middle of "his most intense sentences."

Signor Montanarella was told that The Tribune would like to publish his picture, whereupon he brightened. "Ah!" he cried, "I, too, am a journalist. And I have a desire to see the workings of a great American newspaper. You show me the machinery of your Tribune, and then, after, not before, I give you my picture." Which little arrangement, observed the reporter afterward, "made clear the fact that, in spite of his suave grace of manner, Signor Montanarella really is a very shrewd business man."

Therefore, during the better part of a Saturday afternoon they toured the Tribune building—the reporter and Signor Montanarella—from the great presses in the basement to the lair of the engravers on the fourth floor. Then Signor Montanarella gallantly braved the dark room of Kaplan, the photographer, from whose clutches he did not escape until he had paid his debt in full.

Signor Silvio Montanarella